

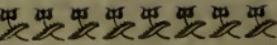
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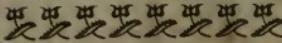
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GORDON
BOTTOMLEY

THE RIDING
TO LITHEND

Mdccccx





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THE RIDING TO LITHEND



THE RIDING TO LITHEND
A PLAY IN ONE ACT BY
GORDON BOTTOMLEY



PORTLAND MAINE
THOMAS B MOSHER
MDCCCCX

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THOMAS B MOSHER
1910

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TO EDWARD THOMAS

HERE in the North we speak of you,
And dream (and wish the dream were true)
That when the evening has grown late
You will appear outside our gate—
As though some Gipsy-Scholar yet
Sought this far place that men forget ;
Or some tall hero still unknown,
Out of the Mabinogion,
Were seen at nightfall looking in,
Passing mysteriously to win
His earlier earth, his ancient mind,
Where man was true and life more kind
Lived with the mountains and the trees
And other steadfast presences,
Where large and simple passions gave
The insight and the peace we crave,
And he no more had nigh forgot
The old high battles he had fought.

Ah, pause to-night outside our gate
And enter ere it is too late

*To see the garden's deep on deep
And talk a little ere we sleep.*

*When you were here a year ago
I told you of a glorious woe,
The ancient woe of Gunnar dead
And its proud train of men long sped,
Fit brothers to your noble thoughts ;
Then, as their shouts and Gunnar's shouts
Went down once more undyingly
And the fierce saga was put by,
I told you of my old desire
To light again that bygone fire,
To body Hallgerd's ruinous
Great hair and wrangling mouth for us,
And hear her voice deny again
That hair to Gunnar in his pain.*

*Because your heart could understand
The hopes of their primeval land,
The hearts of dim heroic forms
Made clear by tenderness and storms,
You caught my glow and urged me on ;
So now the tale is once more done
I turn to you, I bring my play,
Longing, O friend, to hear you say
I have not dwarfed those olden things
Nor tarnished by my furbishings.*

*I bring my play, I turn to you
And wish it might to-night be true
That you would seek this old small house
Twixt laurel boughs and apple boughs ;
Then I would give it, bravely manned,
To you, and with my play my hand.*

JUNE 30th., 1908.



and the other two were
the same. The first
was a small one and
had a very large
head. The second
was a large one and
had a very small
head. The third
was a medium size
and had a medium
size head. The
fourth was a
medium size and
had a medium
size head. The
fifth was a
medium size and
had a medium
size head. The
sixth was a
medium size and
had a medium
size head. The
seventh was a
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size head. The
eighth was a
medium size and
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size head. The
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twenty-first was a
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twenty-third was a
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had a medium
size head. The
twenty-seventh was a
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had a medium
size head. The
twenty-eighth was a
medium size and
had a medium
size head. The
twenty-ninth was a
medium size and
had a medium
size head. The
thirtieth was a
medium size and
had a medium
size head. The
thirty-first was a
medium size and
had a medium
size head. The
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thirty-seventh was a
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size head. The
thirty-eighth was a
medium size and
had a medium
size head. The
thirty-ninth was a
medium size and
had a medium
size head. The
forty-thousandth was a
medium size and
had a medium
size head.



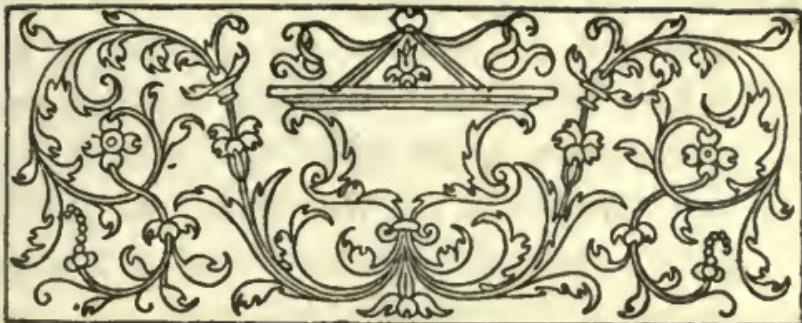
THE RIDING TO LITHEND



PERSONS

GUNNAR HAMUNDSSON
HALLGERD LONGCOAT, his Wife
RANNVEIG, his Mother
ODDNY, ASTRID, and STEINVOR, Hall-
gerd's House-women
ORMILD, a Woman Thrall
BIARTEY, JOFRID, and GUDFINN, Beggar-
women
GIZUR THE WHITE, MORD VALGARD-
SSON, THORGRIM THE EASTERLING,
THORBRAND THORLEIKSSON and
ASBRAND his Brother, AUNUND,
THORGEIR and HROALD, Riders
Many other riders and voices of riders

In Iceland, A. D. 990



THE RIDING TO LITHEND

The scene is the hall of GUNNAR'S house at Lithend in South Iceland. The portion shewn is set on the stage diagonally, so that to the right one end is seen while, from the rear corner of this, one side runs down almost to the left front.

The side wall is low and wainscotted with carved panelling on which hang weapons, shields, and coats of mail. In one place a panel slid aside shews a shut bed.

In front of the panelling are two long benches with a carved high-seat between them. Across the end of the hall are similar panellings and the seats, with corresponding tables, of the women's dais; behind these and in the gable wall is a high narrow door with a rounded top.

A timber roof slopes down to the side wall and is upheld by cross-beams and two rows of tall pillars which make a rather narrow nave of the centre of the hall. One of these rows runs parallel to the side wall, the pair of pillars before the high-seat being carven and ended with images; of the other row only two pillars are visible at the extreme right. Within this nave is the space for the hearths; but the only hearth visible is the one near the women's dais. In the roof above it there is a louvre: the fire glows and no smoke rises. The hall is lit everywhere by the firelight.

The rafters over the women's dais carry a floor at the level of the side walls, forming an open loft which is reached by a wide ladder fixed against the wall: a bed is seen in this loft. Low in the roof at intervals are shuttered casements, one being above the loft: all the shutters are closed.

Near the fire a large shaggy hound is sleeping; and ORMILD, in the undyed woollen dress of a thrall, is combing wool.

ODDNY stands spinning at the side; near her ASTRID and STEINVOR sit stitching a robe which hangs between them.

ASTRID



IGHT is a winter long : and even-
ing falls.

Night, night and winter and the
heavy snow
Burden our eyes, intrude upon our
dreams,

And make of loneliness an earthly place.

ORMILD

This bragging land of freedom that entralls me
Is still the fastness of a secret king
Who treads the dark like snow, of old king Sleep.
He works with night, he has stolen death's tool frost
That makes the breaking wave forget to fall.

ASTRID

Best mind thy comb-pot and forget our king
Before the Longcoat helps at thy awaking.
I like not this forsaken quiet house.
The house-men out at harvest in the Isles
Never return. Perhaps they went but now,
Yet I am sore with fearing and expecting
Because they do not come. They will not come.
I like not this forsaken quiet house,
This late last harvest, and night creeping in.

ODDNY

I like not dwelling in an outlaw's house.
Snow shall be heavier upon some eyes
Than you can tell of — ay, and unseen earth
Shall keep that snow from filling those poor eyes.
This void house is more void by brooding things
That do not happen than by absent men.
Sometimes when I awaken in the night
My throbbing ears are mocking me with rumours
Of crackling beams, beams falling, and loud flames.

ASTRID, *pointing to the weapons by the high-sea*

The bill that Gunnar won in a far sea-fight
Sings inwardly when battle impends ; as a harp
Replies to the wind thus answers it to fierceness,
So tense its nature is and the spell of its welding ;
Then trust ye well that while the bill is silent
No danger thickens, for Gunnar dies not singly.

STEINVOR

But women are let forth free when men go
burning ?

ODDNY

Fire is a hurrying thing, and fire by night
Can see its way better than men see theirs.

ASTRID

The land will not be nobler or more holpen
If Gunnar burns and we go forth unsinged.
Why will he break the atonement that was set ?
That wise old Njal who has the second sight
Foretold his death if he should slay twice over
In the same kin or break the atonement set :
Yet has he done these things and will not care.
Kolskegg, who kept his back in famous fights,
Sailed long ago and far away from us
Because that doom is on him for the slayings ;
Yet Gunnar bides although that doom is on him
And he is outlawed by defiance of doom.

STEINVOR

Gunnar has seen his death : he is spoken for.
He would not sail because, when he rode down
Unto the ship, his horse stumbled and threw him,
His face toward the Lithe and his own fields.
Olaf the Peacock bade him be with him
In his new mighty house so carven and bright,
And leave this house to Rannveig and his sons :
He said that would be well, yet never goes.
Is he not thinking death would ride with him ?
Did not Njal offer to send his sons,
Skarphedin ugly and brave and Hauskuld with him,
To hold this house with Gunnar, who refused them,

Saying he would not lead young men to death?
I tell you Gunnar is done. . . . His fetch is out.

ODDNY

Nay, he's been topmost in so many fights
That he believes he shall fight on untouched.

STEINVOR

He rides to motes and Things before his foes.
He has sent his sons harvesting in the Isles.
He takes deliberate heed of death — to meet it,
Like those whom Odin needs. He is fey, I
tell you —

And if we are past the foolish ardour of girls
For heroisms and profitless loftiness
We shall get gone when bedtime clears the house.
'T is much to have to be a hero's wife,
And I shall wonder if Hallgerd cares about it :
Yet she may kindle to it ere my heart quickens.
I tell you, women, we have no duty here :
Let us get gone to-night while there is time,
And find new harbouring ere the laggard dawn,
For death is making narrowing passages
About this hushed and terrifying house.

*RANNVEIG, an old wimpled woman, enters
as if from a door at the unseen end of the
hall.*

ASTRID

He is so great and manly, our master Gunnar,
There are not many ready to meet his weapons :
And so there may not be much need of weapons.
He is so noble and clear, so swift and tender,
So much of Iceland's fame in foreign places,
That too many love him, too many honour him
To let him die, lest the most gleaming glory
Of our grey country should be there put out.

RANNVEIG

My son has enemies, girl, enemies
Who will not lose the joy of hurting him.
This little land is no more than a lair
That holds too many fiercenesses too straitly,
And no man will refuse the rapture of killing
When outlawry has made it cheap and righteous.
So long as any one perceives he knows
A bare place for a weapon on my son
His hand shall twitch to fit a weapon in.
Indeed he shall lose nothing but his life
Because a woman is made so evil fair,
Wasteful and white and proud in harmful acts.
I lose two sons when Gunnar's eyes are still,
For then will Kolskegg never more turn home.
If Gunnar would but sail three years would pass ;
Only three years of banishment said the doom —

So few, so few, for I can last ten years
With this unshrunken body and steady heart.

To ORMILD.

Have I sat down in comfort by the fire
And waited to be told the thing I knew?
Have any men come home to the young women,
Thinking old women do not need to hear,
That you can play at being a bower-maid
In a long gown although no beasts are foddered?
Up, lass, and get thy coats about thy knees,
For we must cleanse the byre and heap the
midden
Before the master knows — or he will go,
And there is peril for him in every darkness.

ORMILD, tucking up her skirts

Then are we out of peril in the darkness?
We should do better to nail up the doors
Each night and all night long and sleep through it,
Giving the cattle meat and straw by day.

ODDNY

Ay, and the hungry cattle should sing us to
sleep.

The others laugh. ORMILD goes out to the left; RANNVEIG is following her, but pauses at the sound of a voice.

HALLGERD, *beyond the door of the
women's dais*

Dead men have told me I was better than fair,
And for my face welcomed the danger of me:
Then am I spent?

*She enters angrily, looking backward through
the doorway.*

Must I shut fast my doors
And hide myself? Must I wear up the rags
Of mortal perished beauty and be old?
Or is there power left upon my mouth
Like colour, and lilting of ruin in my eyes?
Am I still rare enough to be your mate?
Then why must I shame at feasts and bear myself
In shy ungainly ways, made flushed and conscious
By squat numb gestures of my shapeless head—
Ay, and its wagging shadow—clouted up,
Twice tangled with a bundle of hot hair,
Like a thick cot-quean's in the settling time?
There are few women in the Quarter now
Who do not wear a shapely fine-webbed coif
Stitched by dark Irish girls in Athcliath
With golden flies and pearls and glinting things:
Even my daughter lets her big locks show,
Show and half show, from a hood gentle and close
That spans her little head like her husband's hand.

GUNNAR, *entering by the same door*

I like you when you bear your head so high ;
Lift but your heart as high, you could get crowned
And rule a kingdom of impossible things.
You would have moon and sun to shine together,
Snow-flakes to knit for apples on bare boughs,
Yea love to thrive upon the terms of hate.
If I had fared abroad I should have found
In many countries many marvels for you —
Though not more comeliness in peopled Romeborg
And not more haughtiness in Mickligarth
Nor craftiness in all the isles of the world,
And only golden coifs in Athcliath :
Yet you were ardent that I should not sail,
And when I could not sail you laughed out loud
And kissed me home.

HALLGERD, *who has been biting her nails*

And then . . . and doubtless . . . and
strangely . . .

And not more thriftiness in Bergthorsknoll
Where Njal saves old soft sackcloth for his wife.
O, I must sit with peasants and aged women,
And keep my head wrapped modestly and seemly ;

She turns to RANNVEIG.

I must be humble — as one who lives on others.

She snatches off her wimple, slipping her gold circlet as she does so, and loosens her hair.

Unless I may be hooded delicately
And use the adornment noble women use
I'll mock you with my flown young widowhood,
Letting my hair go loose past either cheek
In two bright clouds and drop beyond my bosom,
Turning the waving ends under my girdle
As young glad widows do, and as I did
Ere ever you saw me—ay, and when you found me
And met me as a king meets a queen
In the undying light of a summer night
With burning robes and glances—stirring the
heart with scarlet.

She tucks the long ends of her hair under her girdle.

RANNVEIG

You have cast the head-ring of the nobly nurtured,
Being eager for a bold uncovered head.
You are conversant with a widow's fancies
Ay, you are ready with your widowhood :
Two men have had you, chilled their bosoms
with you,
And trusted that they held a precious thing—
Yet your mean passionate wastefulness poured out
Their lives for joy of seeing something done with.
Cannot you wait this time? 'T will not be long.

HALLGERD

I am a hazardous desirable thing,
A warm unsounded peril, a flashing mischief,
A divine malice, a disquieting voice :
Thus I was shapen, and it is my pride
To nourish all the fires that mingled me.
I am not long moved, I do not mar my face,
Though men have sunk in me as in a quicksand.
Well, death is terrible. Was I not worth it ?
Does not the light change on me as I breathe ?
Could I not take the hearts of generations,
Walking among their dreams ? O, I have might,
Although it drives me too and is not my own
deed

And Gunnar is great, or he had died long since.
It is my joy that Gunnar stays with me :
Indeed the offence is theirs who hunted him,
His banishment is not just; his wrongs increase,
His honour and his following shall increase
If he is steadfast for his blamelessness.

RANNVEIG

Law is not justice, but the sacrifice
Of singular virtues to the dull world's ease of
mind ;
It measures men by the most vicious men ;
It is a bargaining with vanities,

Lest too much right should make men hate
each other

And hasten the last battle of all the nations.
Gunnar should have kept the atonement set,
For then those men would turn to other quarrels.

GUNNAR

I know not why it is I must be fighting,
For ever fighting, when the slaying of men
Is a more weary and aimless thing to me
Than most men think it and most
women too.

There is a woman here who grieves she loves me,
And she too must be fighting me for ever
With her dim ravenous unsated mind.
Ay, Hallgerd, there's that in her which desires
Men to fight on for ever because she lives :
When she took form she did it like a hunger
To nibble earth's lip away until the sea
Poured down the darkness. Why then should I sail
Upon a voyage that can end but here ?
She means that I shall fight until I die :
Why must she be put off by whittled years,
When none can die until his time has come ?

He turns to the hound by the fire.

Samm, drowsy friend, dost scent a prey in dreams ?
Shake off thy shag of sleep and get to thy watch :

'T is time to be our eyes till the next light.
Out, out to the yard, good Samm.

He goes to the left, followed by the hound. In the meantime HALLGERD has seated herself in the high-seat near the sewing women, turning herself away and tugging at a strand of her hair, the end of which she bites.

RANNVEIG, *intercepting him*

Nay, let me take him.
It is not safe — there may be men who hide. . .
Hallgerd, look up; call Gunnar to you there:

HALLGERD *is motionless.*

Lad, she beckons. I say you shall not come.

GUNNAR, *laughing*

Fierce woman, teach me to be brave in age,
And let us see if it is safe for you.

He leads RANNVEIG out, his hand on her shoulder; the hound goes with them.

STEINVOR

Mistress, my heart is big with mutinies
For your proud sake: does not your heart
mount up?

He is an outlaw now and could not hold you
If you should choose to leave him. Is it not law?
Is it not law that you could loose this marriage —
Nay, that he loosed it shamefully years ago
By a hard blow that bruised your innocent cheek,
Dishonouring you to lesser women and chiefs?
See, it burns up again at the stroke of thought.
Come, leave him, mistress ; we will go with you.
There is no woman in the country now
Whose name can kindle men as yours can do—
Ay, many would pile for you the silks he grudges;
And if you did withdraw your potent presence
Fire would not spare this house so reverently.

HALLGERD

Am I a wandering flame that sears and passes ?
We must bide here, good Steinvor, and be quiet.
Without a man a woman cannot rule,
Nor kill without a knife ; and where 's the man
That I shall put before this goodly Gunnar?
I will not be made less by a less man.
There is no man so great as my man Gunnar :
I have set men at him to show forth his might ;
I have planned thefts and breakings of his word
When my pent heart grew sore with fermentation
Of malice too long undone, yet could not stir him.
O, I will make a battle of the Thing,
Where men vow holy peace, to magnify him.

Is it not rare to sit and wait o' nights,
Knowing that murderousness may even now
Be coming down outside like second darkness
Because my man is greater?

STEINVOR, *shudderingly*

Is it not rare.

HALLGERD

That blow upon the face
So long ago is best not spoken of.
I drove a thrall to steal and burn at Otkell's
Who would not sell to us in famine time
But denied Gunnar as if he were suppliant:
Then at our feast when men rode from the
Thing
I spread the stolen food and Gunnar knew.
He smote me upon the face . . . indeed he
smote me . . .
O, Gunnar smote me and had shame of me
And said he'd not partake with any thief;
Although I stole to injure his despiser
But if he had abandoned me as well
'T is I who should have been unmated now;
For many men would soon have judged me thief
And shut me from this land until I died—
And then I should have lost him. . . . Yet he
smote me

ASTRID

He kept you his—yea, and maybe saved you
From a debasement that could madden or kill,
For women thieves ere now have felt a knife
Severing ear or nose. And yet the feud
You sowed with Otkell's house shall murder
Gunnar.

Otkell was slain : then Gunnar's enviers,
Who could not crush him under his own horse
At the big horse-fight, stirred up Otkell's son
To avenge his father ; for should he be slain
Two in one stock would prove old Njal's
foretelling,

And Gunnar's place be emptied either way
For those high helpless men who cannot fill it.
O, mistress, you have hurt us all in this :
You have cut off your strength, you have
maimed yourself,

You are losing power and worship and men's trust.
When Gunnar dies no other man dare take you.

HALLGERD

You gather poison in your mouth for me.
A high-born woman may handle what she fancies
Without being ear-pruned like a pilfering beggar.
Look to your ears if you touch ought of mine :
Ay, you shall join the mumping sisterhood
And tramp and learn your difference from me.

She turns from ASTRID.

Steinvor, I have remembered the great veil,
The woven cloud, the tissue of gold and garlands,
That Gunnar took from some outlandish ship
And thinks was made in Greekland or in Hind :
Fetch it from the ambry in the bower.

STEINVOR *goes out by the dais door.*

ASTRID

Mistress, indeed you are a cherished woman.
That veil is worth a lifetime's weight of coifs :
I have heard a queen offered her daughter for it,
But Gunnar said it should come home and wait—
And then gave it to you. The half of Iceland
Tells fabulous legends of a fabulous thing,
Yet never saw it : I know they never saw it,
For ere it reached the ambry I came on it
Tumbled in the loft with ragged kirtles.

HALLGERD

What, are you there again ? Let Gunnar alone.

STEINVOR *enters with the veil folded.*

HALLGERD *takes it with one hand and shakes it into a heap.*

This is the cloth. He brought it out at night,
In the first hour that we were left together,

And begged of me to wear it at high feasts
And more outshine all women of my time :
He shaped it to my head with my gold circlet,
Saying my hair smouldered like Rhine-fire through,
He let it fall about my neck, and fall
About my shoulders, mingle with my skirts,
And billow in the draught along the floor.

She rises and holds the veil behind her head.

I know I dazzled as if I entered in
And walked upon a windy sunset and drank it,
Yet must I stammer with such strange uncouthness
And tear it from me, tangling my arms in it.
Why should I so befool myself and seem
A laughable bundle in each woman's eyes,
Wearing such things as no one ever wore,
Useless no head-cloth too unlike
my fellows.

Yet he turns miser for a tiny coif.
It would cut into many golden coifs
And dim some women in their Irish clouts —
But no ; I 'll shape and stitch it into shifts,
Smirch it like linen, patch it with rags, to watch
His silent anger when he sees my answer.
Give me thy shears, girl Oddny.

ODDNY

You 'll not part it ?

HALLGERD

I 'll shorten it.

ODDNY

I have no shears with me.

HALLGERD

No matter ; I can start it with my teeth
And tear it down the folds. So. So. So. So.
Here 's a fine shift for summer : and another.
I 'll find my shears and chop out waists and
neck-holes.

Ay, Gunnar, Gunnar !

She throws the tissue on the ground, and goes out by the dais door.

ODDNY, *lifting one of the pieces*

O me ! A wonder has vanished.

STEINVOR

What is a wonder less ? She has done finely,
Setting her worth above dead marvels and
shows. . . .

The deep menacing baying of the hound is heard near at hand. A woman's cry follows it.

They come, they come ! Let us flee by the bower !

Starting up, she stumbles in the tissue and sinks upon it. The others rise.

You are leaving me—will you not wait for me—Take, take me with you

Mingled cries of women are heard.

GUNNAR, *outside*

Samm, it is well : be still.

Women, be quiet; loose me ; get from my feet, Or I will have the hound to wipe me clear. . . .

STEINVOR, *recovering herself*

Women are sent to spy.

The sound of a door being opened is heard.

GUNNAR enters from the left, followed by three beggar-women, BIARTEY, JOFRID, and GUDFINN. They hobble and limp, and are swathed in shapeless nameless rags which trail about their feet ; BIARTEY'S left sleeve is torn completely away, leaving her arm bare and mud-smeared ; the others' skirts are torn, and JOFRID'S gown at the neck ; GUDFINN wears a felt hood buttoned under her chin, the others' faces are

*almost hid in falling tangles of grey hair.
Their faces are shrivelled and weather-beaten, and BIARTEY'S mouth is distorted by two front teeth that project like tusks.*

GUNNAR

Get in to the light.

Yea, has he mouthed ye? . . . What men send ye here?
Who are ye? Whence come ye? What do ye seek?
I think no mother ever suckled you:
You must have dragged your roots up in waste places
One foot at once, or heaved a shoulder up—

BIARTEY, *interrupting him*

Out of the bosoms of cairns and standing stones.
I am Biartey: she is Jofrid: she is Gudfinn:
We are lone women known to no man now.
We are not sent: we come.

GUNNAR

Well, you come.

You appear by night, rising under my eyes
Like marshy breath or shadows on the wall;
Yet the hound scented you like any evil
That feels upon the night for a way out.
And do you, then, indeed wend alone?
Came you from the West or the sky-covering North,
Yet saw no thin steel moving in the dark?

BIARTEY

Not West, not North : we slept upon the East,
Arising in the East where no men dwell.
We have abided in the mountain places,
Chanted our woes among the black rocks
crouching ;

GUDFINN joins her in a sing-song utterance.

From the East, from the East we drove and the
wind waved us,
Over the heaths, over the barren ashes.
We are old, our eyes are old, and the light
hurts us,
We have skins on our eyes that part alone to
the star-light.
We stumble about the night, the rocks tremble
Beneath our trembling feet; black sky thickens,
Breaks into clots, and lets the moon upon us.

*JOFRID joins her voice to the voices of the
other two.*

Far from the men who fear us, men who stone us,
Hiding, hiding, flying whene'er they slumber,
High on the crags we pause, over the moon-gulfs;
Black clouds fall and leave us up in the moon-depths
Where wind flaps our hair and cloaks like fin-webs,
Ay and our sleeves that toss with our arms and the
cadence

Of quavering crying among the threatening echoes.
Then we spread our cloaks and leap down the rock-stairs,
Sweeping the heaths with our skirts, greying the dew-bloom,
Until we feel a pool on the wide dew stretches
Stilled by the moon or ruffling like breast feathers,
And, with grey sleeves cheating the sleepy herons,
Squat among them, pillow us there and sleep.
But in the harder wastes we stand upright,
Like splintered rain-worn boulders set to the wind
In old confederacy, and rest and sleep.

HALLGERD'S women are huddled together
and clasping each other.

ODDNY

What can these women be who sleep like horses,
Standing up in the darkness What will
they do

GUNNAR

Ye wail like ravens and have no human thoughts.
What do ye seek? What will ye here with us?

BIARTEY, as all three cower suddenly
Succour upon this terrible journeying.
We have a message for a man in the West,

Sent by an old man sitting in the East.
We are spent, our feet are moving wounds, our
bodies
Dream of themselves and seem to trail behind us
Because we went unfed down in the mountains.
Feed us and shelter us beneath your roof,
And put us over the Markfleet, over the channels.
We are weak old women: we are beseeching you.

GUNNAR

You may bide here this night, but on the morrow
You shall go over, for tramping shameless women
Carry too many tales from stead to stead —
And sometimes heavier gear than breath and lies.
These women will tell the mistress all I grant you;
Get to the fire until she shall return.

BIARTEY

Thou art a merciful man and we shall thank thee.

GUNNAR goes out again to the left.

*The old women approach the young ones
gradually.*

Little ones, do not doubt us. Could we hurt you?
Because we are ugly must we be bewitched?

STEINVOR

Nay, but bewitch us.

BIARTEY

Not in a litten house :
Not ere the hour when night turns on itself
And shakes the silence : not while ye wake together.
Sweet voice, tell us, was that verily Gunnar ?

STEINVOR

Arrh — do not touch me, unclean flyer-by-night :
Have ye birds' feet to match such bat-webbed fingers ?

BIARTEY

I am only a cowed curst woman who walks
with death ;
I will crouch here. Tell us, was it Gunnar ?

ODDNY

Yea, Gunnar surely. Is he not big enough
To fit the songs about him ?

BIARTEY

He is a man.

Why will his manhood urge him to be dead ?
We walk about the whole old land at night,
We enter many dales and many halls :
And everywhere is talk of Gunnar's greatness,
His slayings and his fate outside the law.
The last ship has not gone : why will he tarry ?

ODDNY

He chose a ship, but men who rode with him
Say that his horse threw him upon the shore,
His face toward the Lithe and his own fields;
As he arose he trembled at what he gazed on
(Although those men saw nothing pass or meet them)
And said What said he, girls?

ASTRID

“ Fair is the Lithe:
So fair I never thought it was so fair.
Its corn is white, its meadows green after mowing.
I will ride home again and never leave it.”

ODDNY

’T is an unlikely tale : he never said it.
No one could mind such things in such an hour.
Plainly he saw his fetch come down the sands,
And knew he need not seek another country
And take that with him to walk upon the deck
In night and storm.

GUDFINN

He, he, he ! No man speaks thus.

JOFRID

No man, no man : he must be doomed somewhere.

BIARTEY

Doomed and fey, my sisters. . . . We are too old,
Yet I 'd not marvel if we outlasted him.
Sisters, that is a fair fierce girl who spins
My fair fierce girl, you could fight — but can
you ride?

Would you not shout to be riding in a storm?
Ah . . . h, girls learnt riding well when I was
a girl,
And foam rides on the breakers as I was
taught. . . .

My fair fierce girl, tell me your noble name.

ODDNY

My name is Oddny.

BIARTEY

Oddny, when you are old
Would you not be proud to be no man's purse-
string,
But wild and wandering and friends with the
earth?
Wander with us and learn to be old yet living.
We 'd win fine food with you to beg for us.

STEINVOR

Despised, cast out, unclean, and loose men's
night-bird.

ODDNY

When I am old I shall be some man's friend,
And hold him when the darkness comes

BIARTEY

And mumble by the fire and blink
Good Oddny, let me spin for you awhile,
That Gunnar's house may profit by his guesting :
Come, trust me with your distaff

ODDNY

Are there spells
Wrought on a distaff?

STEINVOR

Only by the Norns,
And they 'll not sit with human folk to-night.

ODDNY

Then you may spin all night for what I care ;
But let the yarn run clean from knots and snarls,
Or I shall have the blame when you are gone.

BIARTEY, *taking the distaff*

Trust well the aged knowledge of my hands ;
Thin and thin do I spin, and the thread draws
finer.

She sings as she spins.

They go by three,
And the moon shivers ;
The tired waves flee,
The hidden rivers
Also flee.

I take three strands ;
There is one for her,
One for my hands,
And one to stir
For another's hands.

I twine them thinner,
The dead wool doubts ;
The outer is inner,
The core slips out

HALLGERD *re-enters by the dais door, holding a pair of shears.*

HALLGERD

What are these women, Oddny? Who let them in?

BIARTEY, *who spins through all that follows*
Lady, the man of fame who is your man
Gave us his peace to-night, and that of his house.

We are blown beggars tramping about the land,
Denied a home for our evil and vagrant hearts ;
We sought this shelter when the first dew
soaked us,

And should have perished by the giant hound
But Gunnar fought it with his eyes and saved us.
That is a strange hound, with a man's mind in it.

HALLGERD, *seating herself in the high-seat*

It is an Irish hound, from that strange soil
Where men by day walk with unearthly eyes
And cross the veils of the air, and are not men
But fierce abstractions eating their own hearts
Impatiently and seeing too much to be joyful. . . .
If Gunnar welcomed ye, ye may remain.

BIARTEY

She is a fair free lady, is she not?
But that was to be looked for in a high one
Who counts among her fathers the bright Sigurd,
The bane of Fafnir the Worm, the end of the god-kings ;
Among her mothers Brynhild, the lass of Odin,
The maddener of swords, the night-clouds' rider.
She has kept sweet that father's lore of bird-speech,
She wears that mother's power to cheat a god.
Sisters, she does well to be proud

JOFRID AND GUDFINN

Ay, well

HALLGERD, *shaping the tissue with her shears*

I need no witch to tell I am of rare seed,
Nor measure my pride nor praise it. Do I not know?
Old women, ye are welcomed : sit with us,
And while we stitch tell us what gossip runs—
But if strife might be warmed by spreading it.

BIARTEY

Lady, we are hungered ; we were lost
All night among the mountains of the East ;
Clouds of the cliffs come down my eyes again. . . .
I pray you let some thrall bring us to food.

HALLGERD

Ye get nought here. The supper is long over;
The women shall not let ye know the food-house,
Or ye 'll be thieving in the night. Ye are idle,
Ye suck a man's house bare and seek another.
'T is bed-time ; get to sleep — that stills much hunger.

BIARTEY

Now it is easy to be seeing what spoils you.
You were not grasping or ought but over warm

When Sigmund, Gunnar's kinsman, guested here.
You followed him, you were too kind with him,
You lavished Gunnar's treasure and gear on him
To draw him on, and did not call that thieving.
Ay, Sigmund took your feuds on him and died
As Gunnar shall. Men have much harm by you.

HALLGERD

Now have I gashed the golden cloth awry:
'T is ended—a ruin of clouts—the worth of
the gift—
Bridal dish-clouts—nay, a bundle of flame.
I'll burn it to a breath of its old queen's ashes:
Fire, O fire, drink up

She throws the shreds of the veil on the glowing embers: they waft to ashes with a brief high flare. She goes to JOFRID.

There's one of you
That holds her head in a bird's sideways fashion:
I know that reach o' the chin. . . . What's
under thy hair?—

She fixes JOFRID with her knee, and lifts her hair.

Pfui,'t is not hair, but sopped and rotting moss—
A thief, a thief indeed And twice a
thief

She has no ears. Keep thy hooked fingers still
While thou art here, for if I miss a mouthful
Thou shalt miss all thy nose. Get up, get up;
I'll lodge ye with the mares

JOFRID, *starting up*

Three men, three men,
Three men have wived you, and for all you gave them
Paid with three blows upon a cheek once kissed—
To every man a blow—and the last blow
All the land knows was won by thieving food. . . .
Yea, Gunnar is ended by the theft and the thief.
Is it not told that when you first grew tall,
A false rare girl, Hrut your own kinsman said
“I know not whence thief’s eyes entered our
blood.”

You have more ears, yet are you not my sister?
Our evil vagrant heart is deeper in you.

HALLGERD, *snatching the distaff from*
BIARTEY

Out and be gone, be gone. Lie with the mountains,
Smother among the thunder; stale dew mould you.
Outstrip the hound, or he shall so embrace you

BIARTEY

Now is all done all done and
all your deed !

She broke the thread, and it shall not join again.
Spindle, spindle, the coiling weft shall dwindle ;
Leap on the fire and burn, for all is done

She casts the spindle upon the fire, and stretches her hands toward it.

HALLGERD, *attacking them with the distaff*
Into the night. . . . Dissolve

BIARTEY, *as the three rush toward the door*

Sisters, away :

Leave the woman to her smouldering beauty,
Leave the fire that's kinder than the woman,
Leave the roof-tree ere it falls. It falls.

GUDFINN *joins her. Each time HALLGERD flags they turn as they chant, and point at her.*

We shall cry no more in the high rock-places,
We are gone from the night, the winds and the
clouds are empty :

Soon the man in the West shall receive our message.

JOFRID'S voice joins the other voices.

Men reject us, yet their house is unstable. . . .
The slayers' hands are warm — the sound of
their riding

Reached us down the ages, ever approaching.

HALLGERD, *at the same time, her voice high over theirs*

Pack, ye rag-heaps — or I 'll unravel you.

THE THREE, *continuously*

House that spurns us, woe shall come upon you :
Death shall hollow you. Now we curse the woman —
May all the woes smite her till she can feel them.
Shall we not roost in her bower yet? Woe ! Woe !

The distaff breaks, and HALLGERD drives them out with her hands. Their voices continue for a moment outside, dying away.

Call to the owl-friends Woe ! Woe ! Woe !

ASTRID

Whence came these mounds of dread to haunt
the night?

It doubles this disquiet to have them near us.

ODDNY

They must be witches — and it was my distaff —
Will fire eat through me

STEINVOR

Or the Norns themselves.

HALLGERD

Or bad old women used to govern by fear.
To bed, to bed — we are all up too late.

STEINVOR, *as she turns with ASTRID
and ODDNY to the dais*

If beds are made for sleep we might sit long.

They go out by the dais door.

GUNNAR, *as he enters hastily from the left*

Where are those women? There 's some secret
in them :

I have heard such others crying down to them.

HALLGERD

They turned foul-mouthed, they beckoned evil
toward us —

I drove them forth a breath ago.

GUNNAR

Forth? Whence?

HALLGERD

By the great door: they cried about the night.

RANNVEIG *follows GUNNAR in.*

GUNNAR

Nay, but I entered there and passed them not.
Mother, where are the women?

RANNVEIG

I saw none come.

GUNNAR

They have not come, they have gone.

RANNVEIG

I crossed the yard,
Hearing a noise, but a big bird dropped past,
Beating my eyes ; and then the yard was clear.

The deep baying of the hound is heard again.

GUNNAR

They must be spies : yonder is news of them.
The wise hound knew them, and knew them again.

The baying is succeeded by one wild howl.

Nay, nay !

Men treat thee sorely, Samm my fosterling :
Even by death thou warnest — but it is meant
That our two deaths will not be far apart.

RANNVEIG

Think you that men are yonder ?

GUNNAR

Men are yonder.

RANNVEIG

My son, my son, get on the rattling war-woof,
The old grey shift of Odin, the hide of steel.
Handle the snake with edges, the fang of the rings.

GUNNAR, *going to the weapons by the high-seat*

There are not enough moments to get under
That heavy fleece : an iron hat must serve

HALLGERD

O brave ! O brave ! — he 'll dare them with no
shield.

GUNNAR, *lifting down the great bill*

Let me but reach this haft, I shall get hold
Of steel enough to fence me all about.

*He shakes the bill above his head : a deep
resonant humming follows.*

*The dais door is thrown open, and ODDNY,
ASTRID, and STEINVOR stream through
in their night-clothes.*

STEINVOR

The bill !

ODDNY

The bill is singing !

ASTRID

The bill sings !

GUNNAR, *shaking the bill again*

Ay, brain-biter, waken. . . . Awake and whisper
Out of the throat of dread thy one brief burden.
Blind art thou, and thy kiss will do no choosing :
Worn art thou to a grey hair's edge, a nothing
That slips through all it finds, seeking moré nothing.
There is a time, brain-biter, a time that comes
When there shall be much quietness for thee :
Men will be still about thee. I shall know.
It is not yet : the wind shall hiss at thee first.
Ahui ! Leap up, brain-biter ; sing again.
Sing ! Sing thy verse of anger and feel my hands.

RANNVEIG

Stand thou, my Gunnar, in the porch to meet them,
And the great door shall keep thy back for thee.

GUNNAR

I had a brother there. Brother, where are
you

HALLGERD

Nay, nay. Get thou, my Gunnar, to the loft,
Stand at the casement, watch them how they come.
Arrows maybe could drop on them from there.

RANNVEIG

'T is good : the woman's cunning for once is faithful.

GUNNAR, *turning again to the weapons*

'T is good, for now I hear a foot that stumbles
Along the stable-roof against the hall.
My bow — where is my bow? Here with its
arrows. . . .

Go in again, you women on the dais,
And listen at the casement of the bower
For men who cross the yard, and for their words.

ASTRID

O, Gunnar, we shall serve you.

ASTRID, ODDNY, and STEINVOR go out by
the dais door.

RANNVEIG

Hallgerd, come ;
We must shut fast the door, bar the great door,
Or they 'll be in on us and murder him.

HALLGERD

Not I: I'd rather set the door wide open
And watch my Gunnar kindling at the peril,
Keeping them back — shaming men for ever
Who could not enter at a gaping door.

RANNVEIG

Bar the great door, I say, or I will bar it —
Door of the house you rule Son, son, com-
mand it.

GUNNAR, as he ascends to the loft

O, spendthrift fire, do you waft up again?
Hallgerd, what riot of ruinous chance will sate
you?

Let the door stand, my mother: it is her way.

He looks out at the casement.

Here's a red kirtle on the lower roof.

He thrusts with the bill through the casement.

A MAN'S VOICE, far off

Is Gunnar within?

THORGRIM THE EASTERLING'S
VOICE, *near the casement*

Find that out for yourselves :
I am only sure his bill is yet within.

A noise of falling is heard.

GUNNAR

The Easterling from Sandgil might be dying —
He has gone down the roof, yet no feet helped him.

*A shouting of many men is heard : GUNNAR
starts back from the casement as several
arrows fly in.*

Now there are black flies biting before a storm.
I see men gathering beneath the cart-shed :
Gizur the White and Geir the priest are there,
And a lean whispering shape that should be Mord.
I have a sting for some one —

He looses an arrow : a distant cry follows.

Valgard's voice. . . .

A shaft of theirs is lying on the roof :
I 'll send it back, for if it should take root
A hurt from their own spent and worthless weapon
Would put a scorn upon their tale for ever.

He leans out for the arrow.

RANNVEIG

Do not, my son : rouse them not up again
When they are slackening in their attack.

HALLGERD

Shoot, shoot it out, and I 'll come up to mock them.

GUNNAR, *loosing the arrow*

Hoia ! Swerve down upon them, little hawk.

A shout follows.

Now they run all together round one man :
Now they murmur

A VOICE

Close in, lift bows again :
He has no shafts, for this is one of ours.

Arrows fly in at the casement.

GUNNAR

Wife, here is something in my arm at last :
The head is twisted — I must cut it clear.

STEINVOR *throws open the dais door and rushes through with a high shriek.*

STEINVOR

Woman, let us out — help us out—
The burning comes—they are calling out for fire.

She shrieks again. ODDNY and ASTRID, who have come behind her, muffle her head in a kirtle and lift her.

ASTRID, *turning as they bear her out*

Fire suffuses only her cloudy brain :
The flare she walks in is on the other side
Of her shot eyes. We heard a passionate voice,
A shrill unwomanish voice that must be Mord,
With “Let us burn him — burn him house and all.”
And then a grave and trembling voice replied
“Although my life hung on it, it shall not be.”
Again the cunning fanatic voice went on
“I say the house must burn above his head.”
And the unlifted voice “Why wilt thou speak
Of what none wishes : it shall never be.”

ASTRID and ODDNY *disappear with STEINVOR.*

GUNNAR.

To fight with honest men is worth much friendship :
I ’ll strive with them again.

He lifts his bow and loosens arrows at intervals while HALLGERD and RANNVEIG speak.

HALLGERD, *in an undertone to RANNVEIG, looking out meanwhile to the left*

Mother, come here —

Come here and hearken. Is there not a foot,
A stealthy step, a fumbling on the latch
Of the great door? They come, they come,
old mother :

Are you not blithe and thirsty, knowing they come
And cannot be held back? Watch and be secret,
To feel things pass that cannot be undone.

RANNVEIG

It is the latch. Cry out, cry out for Gunnar,
And bring him from the loft.

HALLGERD

O, never :

For then they'd swarm upon him from the roof.
Leave him up there and he can bay both armies,
While the whole dance goes merrily before us
And we can warm our hearts at such a flare.

RANNVEIG, *turning both ways, while HALLGERD watches her gleefully*

Gunnar, my son, my son ! What shall I do . . .

ORMILD enters from the left, white and with her hand to her side, and walking as one sick.

HALLGERD

Bah — here's a bleached assault

RANNVEIG

O, lonesome thing,
To be forgot and left in such a night.
What is there now — are terrors surging still?

ORMILD

I know not what has gone : when the men came
I hid in the far cowhouse. I think I swooned
And then I followed the shadow. Who is dead ?

RANNVEIG

Go to the bower : the women will care for you.

ORMILD totters up the hall from pillar to pillar.

ASTRID, entering by the dais door

Now they have found the weather-ropes and
lashed them
Over the carven ends of the beams outside :
They bear on them, they tighten them with levers,
And soon they'll tear the high roof off the hall.

GUNNAR

Get back and bolt the women into the bower.

ASTRID takes ORMILD, who has just reached her, and goes out with her by the dais door, which closes after them.

Hallgerd, go in : I shall be here thereafter.

HALLGERD

I will not stir. Your mother had best go in.

RANNVEIG

How shall I stir?

VOICES, *outside and gathering volume*

Ai . . . Ai . . . Reach harder . . . Ai . . .

GUNNAR

Stand clear, stand clear — it moves.

THE VOICES

It moves . . . Ai, Ai . . .

The whole roof slides down rumblingly, disappearing with a crash behind the wall of the house. All is dark above. Fine snow sifts down now and then to the end of the play.

GUNNAR, *handling his bow*

The wind has changed : 't is coming on to snow.
The harvesters will hurry in to-morrow.

THORBRAND THORLEIKSSON *appears above the wall-top a little past GUNNAR, and, reaching noiselessly with a sword, cuts GUNNAR'S bowstring.*

GUNNAR, *dropping the bow and seizing his bill*

Ay, Thorbrand, is it thou ? That 's a rare blade,
To shear through hemp and gut . . . Let your
wife have it
For snipping needle-yarn ; or try it again.

THORBRAND, *raising his sword*

I must be getting back ere the snow thickens :
So here 's my message to the end — or farther.
Gunnar, this night it is time to start your journey
And get you out of Iceland

GUNNAR, *thrusting at THORBRAND with the bill*

I think it is :
So you shall go before me in the dark.
Wait for me when you find a quiet shelter.

*THORBRAND sinks backward from the wall
and is heard to fall farther. Immediately
ASBRAND THORLEIKSSON starts up in
his place.*

ASBRAND, striking repeatedly with a sword
O, down, down, down !

GUNNAR, parrying the blows with the bill

Ay, Asbrand, thou as well ?
Thy brother Thorbrand was up here but now :
He has gone back the other way, maybe —
Be hasty, or you 'll not come up with him.

*He thrusts with the bill : ASBRAND lifts a
shield before the blow.*

Here's the first shield that I have seen to-night.

The bill pierces the shield : ASBRAND disappears and is heard to fall. GUNNAR turns from the casement.

Hallgerd, my harp that had but one long string,
But one low song, but one brief wingy flight,
Is voiceless, for my bowstring is cut off.
Sever two locks of hair for my sake now,
Spoil those bright coils of power, give me your hair,
And with my mother twist those locks together
Into a bowstring for me. Fierce small head,
Thy stinging tresses shall scourge men forth by me.

HALLGERD

Does ought lie on it?

GUNNAR

Nought but my life lies on it;
For they will never dare to close on me
If I can keep my bow bended and singing.

HALLGERD, tossing back her hair

Then now I call to your mind that bygone blow
You gave my face; and never a whit do I care
If you hold out a long time or a short.

GUNNAR

Every man who has trod a war-ship's deck,
And borne a weapon of pride, has a proud heart
And asks not twice for any little thing.
Hallgerd, I 'll ask no more from you, no more.

RANNVEIG, tearing off her wimple

She will not mar her honour of widowhood.
O, widows' manes are priceless Off, mean
wimple —

I am a finished widow, why do you hide me?
Son, son who knew my bosom before hers,
Look down and curse for an unreverend thing

An old bald woman who is no use at last.
These bleachy threads, these tufts of death's first
combing,
And loosening heart-strings twisted up together
Would not make half a bowstring. Son, forgive me. . . .

GUNNAR

A grasping woman's gold upon her head
Is made for hoarding, like all other gold :
A spendthrift woman's gold upon her head
Is made for spending on herself. Let be—
She goes her heart's way, and I go to earth.

*AUNUND'S head rises above the wall near
GUNNAR.*

What, are you there?

AUNUND

Yea, Gunnar, we are here.

GUNNAR, thrusting with the bill

Then bide you there.

*AUNUND'S head sinks : THORGEIR'S rises
in the same place.*

How many heads have you?

THORGEIR

But half as many as the feet we grow on.

GUNNAR

And I 've not yet used up (*thrusting again*) all
my hands.

*As he thrusts another man rises a little farther
back, and leaps past him into the loft. Others follow, and GUNNAR is soon surrounded
by many armed men, so that only the rising
and falling of his bill is seen.*

The threshing-floor is full. . . . Up, up, brain-biter !
We work too late to-night — up, open the husks.

O, smite and pulse
On their anvil heads :
The smithy is full,
There are shoes to be made
For the hoofs of the steeds
Of the Valkyr girls

FIRST MAN

Hack through the shaft

SECOND MAN

Receive the blade
In the breast of a shield,
And wrench it round

GUNNAR

For the hoofs of the steeds
Of the Valkyr girls
Who race up the night
To be first at our feast,
First in the play
With immortal spears
In deadly holes

THIRD MAN

Try at his back

MANY VOICES, *shouting in confusion*
Have him down. . . Heels on the bill. . .
Ahui, Ahui. . .

The bill does not rise.

HROALD, *with the breaking voice of a young man, high over all*

Father . . . It is my blow . . . It is I who
kill him . . .

*The crowd parts, suddenly silent, showing
GUNNAR fallen.*

RANNVEIG *covers her face with her hands.*

HALLGERD, *laughing as she leans forward
and holds her breasts in her hands*

O, clear sweet laughter of my heart, flow out !
It is so mighty and beautiful and blithe
To watch a man dying — to hover and watch.

RANNVEIG

Cease : are you not immortal in shame already ?

HALLGERD

Heroes, what deeds ye compass, what great deeds —
One man has held ye from an open door :
Heroes, heroes, are ye undefeated ?

GIZUR, *an old white-bearded man, to the other
riders*

We have laid low to earth a mighty chief :
We have laboured harder than on greater deeds,
And maybe won remembrance by the deeds
Of Gunnar when no deed of ours should live ;
For this defence of his shall outlast kingdoms
And gather him fame till there are no more men.

MORD

Come down and splinter those old birds his gods
That perch upon the carven high-seat pillars,
Wreck every place his shadow fell upon,
Rive out his gear, drive off his forfeit beasts.

SECOND MAN

It shall not be.

MANY MEN

Never.

GIZUR

We 'll never do it :
Let no man lift a blade or finger a clout —
Is not this Gunnar, Gunnar, whom we have slain ?
Home, home, before the dawn shows all our deed.

*The riders go down quickly over the wall-top,
and disappear.*

HALLGERD

Now I shall close his nostrils and his eyes,
And thereby take his blood-feud into my hands.

RANNVEIG

If you do stir I 'll choke you with your hair.
I will not let your murderous mind be near him
When he no more can choose and does not know.

HALLGERD

His wife I was, and yet he never judged me :
He did not set your motherhood between us.
Let me alone — I stand here for my sons.

RANNVEIG

The wolf, the carrion bird, and the fair woman
Hurry upon a corpse, as if they think
That all is left for them the grey gods need not.

*She twines her hands in HALLGERD'S hair
and draws her down to the floor.*

O, I will comb your hair with bones and thumbs,
Array these locks in my right widow's way,
And deck you like the bed-mate of the dead.
Lie down upon the earth as Gunnar lies,
Or I can never match him in your looks
And whiten you and make your heart as cold.

HALLGERD

Mother, what will you do? Unloose me now—
Your eyes would not look so at me alone.

RANNVEIG

Be still, my daughter

HALLGERD

And then?

RANNVEIG

Ah, do not fear—

I see a peril nigh and all its blitheness.
Order your limbs — stretch out your length of beauty,

Let down your hands and close those deepening eyes,
Or you can never stiffen as you should.
A murdered man should have a murdered wife
When all his fate is treasured in her mouth.
This wifely hair-pin will be sharp enough.

HALLGERD, *starting up as RANNVEIG half loosens her to take a hair-pin from her own head*

She is mad, mad O, the bower is barred —
Hallgerd, come out, let mountains cover you

She rushes out to the left.

RANNVEIG, *following her*

The night take you indeed

GIZUR, *as he enters from the left*

Ay, drive her out;
For no man's house was ever better by her.

RANNVEIG

Is an old woman's life desired as well?

GIZUR

We ask that you will grant us earth hereby
Of Gunnar's earth, for two men dead to-night
To lie beneath a cairn that we shall raise.

RANNVEIG

Only for two? Take it: ask more of me.
I wish the measure were for all of you.

GIZUR

Your words must be forgiven you, old mother,
For none has had a greater loss than yours.
Why would he set himself against us all

He goes out.

RANNVEIG

Gunnar, my son, we are alone again.

She goes up the hall, mounts to the loft, and stoops beside him.

O, they have hurt you but that is forgot.
Boy, it is bedtime; though I am too changed,
And cannot lift you up and lay you in,
You shall go warm to bed — I 'll put you there.
There is no comfort in my breast to-night,
But close your eyes beneath my fingers' touch,
Slip your feet down, and let me smooth your hands :
Then sleep and sleep. Ay, all the world's asleep.

She rises.

You had a rare toy when you were awake —
I 'll wipe it with my hair Nay, keep it so,

The colour on it now has gladdened you.
It shall lie near you.

She raises the bill: the deep hum follows.

No; it remembers him,
And other men shall fall by it through Gunnar:
The bill, the bill is singing The bill sings!

She kisses the weapon, then shakes it on high.

CURTAIN



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